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SUBJECT: MFA OFFICIALS DISCUSS C.A.R. AND CHAD WITH DRL/CAR
DESKOFF

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Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt, reasons
1.4 (b/d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: MFA desk officers Charlotte Montel (C.A.R.) and Lt. Col. Marc Conruyt (Chad) briefed DRL/CAR desk officer Stuart Crampton on April 6. Regarding C.A.R., Montel noted limited but growing contact between French and C.A.R. parliamentarians and recent calls for increased government transparency. Information was difficult to obtain, particularly concerning the northwest region. President Bozize's Presidential Guard continued to act with impunity, with Bozize apparently powerless to exert control over the Guard. The GOF had information indicating that Lord's Resistance Army leader Kony had recently been in C.A.R.

¶2. (C) SUMMARY CONT'D: Chad was perhaps the least unified and most fractured country in Africa in terms of ethnic divisions, Conruyt said. He expressed continuing GOF support for Deby, who remained Chad's only credible political leader, and cautioned against the notion that Deby should be asked to consider stepping down a year or two after the May 3 elections. Conruyt noted Deby's problems with Sudan and with other members of his own ethnic group. Paris daily Liberation in its April 8-9 edition carried an article on France's strong commitment to the Deby regime and the importance of French support to Deby's remaining in power. Although not stated directly, the article carried the suggestion that France's policies were not balanced and were tied too directly to one individual (Deby) whose political future and health status were precarious. NOTE: These conversations took place before news of the heightened military activity in Chad began circulating April 11-12. END SUMMARY.

C.A.R.

¶3. (C) Montel said the GOF was not assisting C.A.R.'s parliament but French parliamentarians (Senate and Deputies) were working within their respective "friendship groups" to engage Chad's parliamentarians in promoting visits and increased contact. Montel noted French priorities to encourage democracy, good governance, and free expression. She commented on three MPLC deputies and others, including some journalists, who have asked the government for more transparency regarding several clashes in the northwest that produced scores of deaths. There have also been calls for a government investigation. Montel viewed as very positive

these public calls for a more responsive government.

¶4. (C) Montel commented on the difficulty of obtaining timely and accurate information on C.A.R., especially from the northwest, where only two NGOs (CARITAS and Medecins Sans Frontieres) maintained a semi-permanent presence. France hoped that the Multinational Force of the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa (FOMUC) would collect and disseminate more information. Montel said that France wanted a greater EU role in providing development assistance to C.A.R.; meanwhile, France continued to provide technical assistance via about 40 experts seconded to C.A.R. agencies. She noted particular French interest in public finance and ways to meet IMF conditions so as to overcome salary arrearages for many C.A.R. functionaries.

¶5. (C) Montel lamented the Presidential Guards' brazen impunity and willingness to act violently. She believed President Bozize was "trapped" by the debt he owed to those who helped him gain power, including many in the Presidential Guard. Bozize could neither control some of them nor bring them to justice for their many abuses.

¶6. (C) Montel stressed the serious nature of the attacks, including the killing of civilians, reportedly committed over the past several months by a mixture of rebels, highway bandits ("coupeurs de route"), and other criminal elements operating in the northwest and elsewhere in C.A.R. She said the MFA did not know whether former President Patasse was behind the unrest and doubted that he could coordinate the activities of such diverse groups from Togo, where he has remained in exile since President Bozize seized power in 2003.

¶7. (C) While highlighting the lack of available information about and in C.A.R., particularly in the northwest, Montel said the MFA had reports that Lord's Resistance Army leader

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Jospeh Kony had been in C.A.R. at some point during the last few months. She said the MFA considered these reports credible.

¶8. (C) Montel stressed the importance of C.A.R. in relation to Chad and the security of the sub-region. She noted that northeast C.A.R., along the frontiers with Chad and Sudan, was the most neglected and little-known region of C.A.R. She cautioned that this area was of high concern since unrest from Sudan and Chad could quickly spillover into C.A.R.

CHAD

¶9. (C) The briefing continued during a meeting with back-up Chad deskoff Lt. Col. Marc Conruyt, a military secondee to the MFA. (NOTE: Lead Chad deskoff was on TDY in Benin. END NOTE.) Emphasizing the complexity of Chad and its history, as well as the country's current multiplicity of players and interests, Conruyt said Chad was essentially a "country only in name." Fragile and populated by a large number of nomadic and agriculturalist ethnic groups, Chad was unique, and, in his view, perhaps the least unified African country. Populations with different interests -- black Africans and North African "Arabs" -- found their destinies suddenly and awkwardly intertwined during the colonial period. During that period, French training and education tended to serve the black African community in the south and not the more nomadic "Arab" populations to the north. Conruyt commented that some of the northerners, such as the Zaghawa, were historically viewed as great warriors, which might help explain why they remained largely in control of Chad today. The lack of a military tradition in the south had hampered the development of a mature political opposition, he speculated.

¶10. (C) Conruyt said that rebels of various backgrounds, including the Sudan-supported Rally for Democracy and Liberty (RDL) and former allies of President Deby, had coalesced

against Deby. Although Deby's overthrow remained a major French concern, Conruyt said it was not clear what France would do if Deby were deposed by force. In addition, Conruyt repeatedly said that, despite Deby's serious flaws (including a lack of respect for human rights), Deby was a "statesman" and a much more viable leader than anyone else. The opposition severely lacked the "necessary political skills," in Conruyt's view.

¶11. (C) Conruyt acknowledged that the lifting of presidential term limits, which began with the National Assembly's vote in May 2004 and concluded with the June 2005 referendum, was lamentable. However, when pressed on the issue of whether Deby might stand down a year or two after this May's elections -- provided that a deal was brokered discreetly by France, among others, and that a suitable successor were identified -- Conruyt replied that such intervention by France, the U.S., and other members of the international community would lack legitimacy. Conruyt did not think Deby would agree to step down under such a scenario. France simply viewed Deby as the only person able in the circumstances to lead the strife-ridden country, particularly since the political opposition, according to Conruyt, was "not credible," too divided, and "incapable" of agreeing on any sort of platform other than to have Deby leave power.

¶12. (C) The opposition's boycott of the May 3 election, according to Conruyt, was similar to the boycott of the referendum held in June 2005 to end presidential term limits. Although some members of the opposition had made strong statements threatening to "block" the elections, Conruyt said he did not expect them to succeed in blocking the elections. Conruyt thought it quite possible that, after winning the May 3 election, Deby would make some concessions to the opposition.

¶13. (C) Conruyt highlighted Deby's problems with Sudan and members of his Zaghawa ethnic group, some of whom have accused Deby of failing to protect his own clan members, in Darfur and Chadian villages on the Sudanese border, from Janjaweed and Sudanese government attacks. Conruyt remarked that Deby belonged to both the Bideyat and the Zaghawa, very similar but separate groups, with the Bideyat nonetheless "subordinate if not inferior" to the Zaghawa. Although the exact source and details were murky, Chad continued to provide intermittent support to rebels in Sudan, just as the

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Sudanese government supported rebels in Chad, Conruyt stated. Despite this situation, however, Conruyt said that both governments claimed to work together to monitor the border in efforts to prevent the outbreak of war.

¶14. (C) Asked about the status of the oil revenue management agreement, which Chad breached in 2005, and relations with the World Bank, which suspended all loans to Chad as a result, Conruyt said that the World Bank team currently visiting Chad was attempting to renew contacts, repair the badly damaged relationship, and arrive at a face-saving "gentleman's agreement" to move beyond the current impasse, which benefited neither the Bank nor Chad. Conruyt said he expected that Deby likely would pursue some judicial reforms and anti-corruption measures after his re-election in 2006.

LIBERATION

¶15. (U) The April 8-9 edition of Paris daily Liberation carried a story on the importance of French civilian and military support to Deby's ability to stay in power (ref A). The article notes the role France played in assisting Deby to overcome the March coup attempt and French support for the campaign against the rebels. Deby remains "in the eyes of the former colonial power, and also according to a number of local analyses, the only one who can govern a profoundly

unstable country. Is it Deby or chaos?" asks Liberation. A member of France's military chief of staff in Paris says that French forces "accomplish a deterrent mission concerning external threats and furnish logistical support to Chad's armed forces. In no case will our soldiers participate in combat." But for how long, Liberation asks? A Chadian observer notes: "We are protected and directed by France. No one cares about the future of Chad; the only thing that counts is guaranteeing the regime."

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